

## At the Origins of Monotheism: A Socio-economic Confrontation in Ancient Syro Mesopotamia

What is known as monotheism may be seen, in its earliest manifestation, in the light of an epistemic confrontation of the biblical tradition with the system of knowledge that had developed in the great cities of Mesopotamia. The paper presents a view that is at variance with the communis opinio, both in terms of the nature of the confrontation and of its historical setting.

As for the **nature of the confrontation**, I consider the notion of fate as being more central to Syro-Mesopotamian religion than normally acknowledged. Polytheism was a major intellectual feat in its attempt at breaking down the absolute into component parts, i.e., the deities that represent diverse elements of the world of nature. Fate had remained untouched by this process, and in this regard it may be seen as a form of monotheism ante litteram.

As for the **historical setting**, I consider the patriarchal tradition as encasing the epic memory of a Syro-Mesopotamian splinter group that detached itself from the land of the four banks at a time of deurbanization in the middle Euphrates, and in the process lost its contacts with the organized systems of cult and divination and brought new life to the notion of fate now seen as a living absolute.

This presentation comes at a point in the course when one looks at the **founding figures**, and in particular Abraham. My approach puts the biblical patriarchal tradition in a different and very unconventional light, drawing not only on the biblical text and on historical records, but also on archaeology and ethnography.



Bunche 2209A / Zoom

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2:00PM – 3:00PM



Giorgio Buccellati is a Research Professor in the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, and Professor Emeritus in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and in the Department of History at UCLA. He founded the Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, of which he served as first director from 1973 until 1983 and where he is now Director of the Mesopotamian Lab. He is currently Director of IIMAS – The International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies and of AVASA – Associazione per la Valorizzazione dell'Archeologia e della Storia Antica.

His research interests include the ancient languages, the literature, the religion, the archaeology and the history of Mesopotamia, as well as the theory of archaeology. His publications include site reports, text editions, linguistic and literary studies as well as on archaeological theory, historical monographs and essays on philosophy and spirituality. In his field work, he has developed new approaches to the preservation and presentation of archaeological sites and to community archaeology. With his wife Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, he has worked for many years in the Near East, especially in Syria, Iraq and Turkey. They are at present co-directors of the archaeological expedition to Tell Mozan/Urkesh in North-Eastern Syria.